

DOCUMENTS

RELATING TO

Senate Bill, No 356, "To create the office of Surveyor of Public Lands for the State of Michigan."

JUNE 25, 1838.

Ordered to be printed.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE,
June 20, 1838.

SIR: My attention having just been called to the Senate bill (No. 356) "to create the office of surveyor of public lands for the State of Michigan," I deem it proper to lay before your honorable committee the enclosed copy of a letter, dated 13th of March last, from the surveyor general at Cincinnati, on the subject of dividing his surveying district, and containing official information which has an important bearing on the proposed measure.

It will be seen that, although the surveyor general is decidedly in favor of a separation of Wisconsin and Iowa Territories from his district, he assigns good and substantial reasons for continuing the States of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, undivided. I perfectly concur in his views, that it would be inexpedient to create a new surveying office for the State of Michigan, inasmuch as it would only increase the appropriations to meet the surveying expenses, without corresponding benefits to the service: on the contrary, as will be seen from the explanations given in the surveyor general's letter, (and I might add, so far as the facts are known to this office, they fully confirm his statements,) the progress of the business would be retarded, instead of being advanced. I would, therefore, respectfully join the surveyor general in recommending that the new district should not be created, nor any further division made of the existing district; believing, with him, that such a measure is uncalled for by the public interests, and would involve a useless expenditure of the public money.

Whilst on the subject of surveying offices, I would likewise advert to the recommendation in my communication of the 8th of January last, to the Hon. C. C. Clay, to create a separate surveying office for the State of Illinois, and beg leave, as that question may at some future period again be brought before your honorable committee, to make known the modification which has taken place in my views, after more mature deliberation. Although the embarrassments in the office at St. Louis, in consequence of the large amount of arrears, and the vast extent of the surveying operations in Missouri, still exist, it now appears to me that the objects proposed, by creating a separate district for Illinois, would be attained by simply increasing the force in the office of the surveyor general at St. Louis, or (which would be preferable) by annexing it to the Wisconsin and Iowa

surveying district, created at the present session of Congress. By this latter course, as the office would be situated at Dubuque, which is convenient to the State of Illinois, as well as to the field of operations, and in view of the fact that, under such an arrangement, most of the surveying yet to be done in Illinois might be completed before it would be necessary to extend the surveys in Wisconsin or Iowa Territories much beyond their present limits, (according to the contracts already made and nearly completed,) I would respectfully recommend this latter course, which, if adopted, I feel persuaded would greatly subserve the public interests, and prove a great public convenience. Besides, as regards the economy of the measure, the same remarks made in reference to the proposed new district for the State of Michigan apply with equal force in this case.

I am, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JAS. WHITCOMB,

Commissioner.

To the Hon. WM. S. FULTON,

Committee on Public Lands, U. S. Senate.

SURVEYOR GENERAL'S OFFICE,

Cincinnati, March, 13, 1838.

SIR: In your communication of the 31st January last, on the subject of building offices for the surveyors general, you observe that "there appears to be a disposition in Congress to have a separate surveyor's office for each of the States and Territories." On this subject, permit me to offer a few thoughts for your consideration.

Wisconsin Territory will, in all probability, be erected into a separate surveying district; and, considering the rapid settlement of that region, and its great distance from this office, the interest of the service and of the people of Wisconsin may require it.

But whether a further division of this surveying district is called for by the public interests, or the wants of the inhabitants thereof, is, I think, questionable. The only remaining public lands yet to be surveyed in the three States of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan (Wisconsin being set off) are in the latter State; the surveys of the two former having been completed, excepting a few Indian reserves in Indiana, now about to be surveyed. That part of Michigan which remains to be surveyed offers but little present inducements to emigration. So that if it should even happen that the surveys there should proceed more slowly, in consequence of their distance from this office, and that is not apprehended, neither the public interests, nor those of the settlers, can suffer thereby.

It is confidently believed that the whole of the surveys now ordered in Michigan, can and will be completed within the present year, if left under the superintendence of this office. As this office is familiar with the plan of operations in all its details, and intimately acquainted with the history, progress, and condition of the work in the office, as well as in the field—as well past as present—it does not appear to me that any public advantage would result from the separation of Michigan from this surveying district at the present time.

On the contrary, an increased public expense would be incurred, and the delay in the prosecution of the work, both in the field and in the office, would be unavoidable. But whatever reasons there may be for establishing a separate surveyor's office in Michigan, none such, I think, can exist for separating *Indiana* from this office; for, in that State, as before remarked, *the whole of the public lands* (except a few Indian reserves lately ceded) *have been surveyed*. The records and files of this office, relating to the surveys in Indiana, are nearly as convenient and accessible to the people of that State here, as they would be at its seat of Government; and certainly can be as safely preserved. Moreover, the original field notes and the records of them, as well as the recorded plats of the early surveys in the southeastern part of Indiana, are so mixed up and blended with the surveys of the same period in the western part of Ohio, that much of them cannot be separated. This, to some extent, is the case also with the *files* of this office generally, relating to the surveys in these two States, which have proceeded, *pari passu*, for the last forty years.

The principal, I may say exclusive, design in establishing new surveying districts, I apprehend, is for the greater convenience and facility in conducting the future surveys therein. As, then, the surveys of Indiana are already completed; for this and the reasons before stated, it does appear to me that to erect that State into a separate district would be a measure uncalled for by the public interests, altogether inexpedient, and a useless expenditure of the public money.

I am, very respectfully, sir,

Your obedient servant,

ROBT. T. LYTTLE.

JAMES WHITCOMB, Esq.,

Commissioner General Land Office, Washington.

On the contrary, an increased public expense would be incurred and the delay in the prosecution of the work, both in the field and in the office, would be inevitable. But whatever reasons there may be for establishing a separate surveyor's office in Washington, none such I think can exist for separating Indians from this office; for in that State, as before mentioned, the whole of the public lands (except a few Indian reserves lately ceded) have been surveyed. The records and files of this office relating to the surveys in Indiana are nearly as convenient and accessible to the people of that State here, as they would be at its own Government; and certainly can be as easily preserved. Moreover, the original field notes and the records of them, as well as the recorded plats of the early surveys in the southeastern part of Indiana, are so mixed up and blended with the surveys of the same period in the western part of Ohio, that much of them cannot be separated. There, to some extent, is the case also with the files of this office generally, relating to the surveys in these two States, which have proceeded, but I presume, for the last forty years.

The principal, I may say exclusive, danger in establishing new surveying districts, I apprehend, is for the greater convenience and facility in conducting the future surveys therein. As then, the surveys of Indiana are already completed; for this and the reasons before stated, it does appear to me that to erect that State into a separate district would be a measure uncalled for by the public interests, altogether unnecessary, and a needless expenditure of the public money.

I am, very respectfully, sir,

Your obedient servant,

ROBT. T. LYTLE

JAMES WHITCOMB PAUL,
Commissioner General Land Office Washington.